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In Favour of Foreignization: A Review of Tess Lewis's Translation of *Kruso* by Lutz Seiler (trans. Tess Lewis)

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Seiler, Lutz. *Kruso*. 2014. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015.

———. *Kruso*. Translated by Tess Lewis. London and Melbourne: Scribe, 2017.

In his review of Tess Lewis's 2017 translation of Lutz Seiler's debut novel *Kruso* (2014), Andrew Fuhrmann makes the following observation:

Tess Lewis's translation is serviceable, but a bit lumpen. I wonder if the book would have been better served by a translator who is a poet, someone capable of transfiguring the prose for English.

Fuhrmann's review, which negatively casts Lewis's translation as "lumpen", presents yet another example of the "dominance of fluency in English-language translation", or domestication, which prevails in Anglo-American reviews of translation (Venuti 2). Fluency is prioritised above all else and Heaven forbid the translation be "lumpen". Yet this is the beauty of Lewis's translation. She takes an overtly foreignizing approach to the translation, reflecting the lengthy syntax of the source text, reconstructing the alliteration and explicating specific German terms. This reflects the highly unusual construction of the source text, which includes neologisms, word play and specific references to East German geography.

Before I introduce the text and in the spirit of Venuti's translator's visibility, let me introduce the translator in question. Tess Lewis is an accomplished translator of both German and French literature. She has been the recipient of numerous awards, including PEN USA, PEN UK (which she received for *Kruso*), the NEA and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, to name only a few. She is also Advisory Editor for *The Hudson Review* and Co-Chair of the PEN Translation Committee.

Although Lutz Seiler's background is in poetry, his debut novel was a bestseller in Germany and was awarded the German Book Prize in 2014, the Uwe-Johnson Prize in 2014 and the Marie-Luise-Kashnitz Prize in 2015. Set in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1989, *Kruso* is typical of the *Wenderoman* genre, which explores the social upheaval before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The story follows Ed, a student of German literature. After the unexpected and brutal death of his girlfriend, G., Ed spontaneously sets off to the Baltic Island of Hiddensee. He is taken on as a dishwasher by the Klausner, a monastery-turned-restaurant (also a metaphorical ship), and becomes acquainted with the other eccentric and intellectual fellow staff (or 'crew'). One of these staff members is a Russian-German man by the name of *Kruso* (or 'Crusoe' - the reference is deliberate), with whom Ed develops a close friendship. *Kruso* is the leader of an underground movement of 'castaways', people trying to escape the GDR regime by going to the Island. Those who attempt to swim to Denmark are shot; the Island is patrolled by guards with machine guns. But with Ed as his side-kick, 'Friday', *Kruso* organizes numerous events on the Island for the castaways, manages their sleeping arrangements, and preaches the freedom of the soul as opposed to freedom from the State. As the GDR regime disintegrates, *Kruso* starts to lose his grip on reality, hanging on to what he feels was his mission on the Island. Towards the end he says: "The seed of true freedom, Ed, thrives where man is not free" (Seiler 405). The novel ends just as tragically as it begins.

Lewis' translation strategies are equally poetic to Seiler's. Alliteration, for example, moves seamlessly from one language to another: "Kreuzspinne und Kreuzschnabel!" (73) becomes "spiders and spoonbills!" (66) and "Ratschratsch" (135) is rendered as "ritch-ratch" (126). Sometimes additional effects are created in the target text. For example, Seiler's wordplay on the "Versteck im See, geheime See, Hiddensee . . ." (32) has an additional alliteration in English, given the wordplay is on the actual English word 'hidden': "A hide-out in the sea, hidden sea, Hiddensea . . ." (25).

Lewis also retains the neologisms, which she explicates in the source text. Take for example the German word "Esskaa", rendered by Lewis as "esskay". The term is coined by Seiler in the original text, which, as he explains, relates to the itinerant workers:

Inzwischen hatte er verstanden, dass Esskaa nichts anders bedeutete als die gesprochene Abkürzung für Saisonkraft. SK erinnerte an den Begriff des EK, des Entlassungskandidaten beim Militär, und wie es während seiner Zeit bei der Armee eine EK-Bewegung gegeben hatte, ein Konglomerat aus derben bis tödlichen Späßen, verbunden mit einem unbedingten Verlangen nach Unterordnung (alles zusammengenommen eine Art martialischer Vorfreude aus den Tag der >Freiheit<, die Entlassung), würde es auch eine Esskaa-Bewegung geben, schlussfolgerte Ed, natürlich mit eignen, ganz anderen Gesetzen [...].

(80-81)

Ed, in the meantime, had understood that 'esskay' was simply the acronym 'SK' for Saisonkraft, seasonal worker. SK reminded Ed of the term EK for Entlassungskandidaten, discharge candidates in the army, and he reasoned that, just as at the time of his military service there had been an EK culture - a conglomeration of crude to deadly jokes combined with an implicit desire for submission (all in all, a kind of martial anticipation of the day of 'freedom,' of their discharge) - there surely must be an SK culture, with it's own, entirely different set of rules.

(Lewis, 73-74)

The above passage refers to the freedom cult of the itinerant workers, of which Kruso is the leader. The English passage includes German words and tends to follow the sentence structure of the original, as can easily be evinced from the long sentences, typical of Germanic syntax (the brackets are idiosyncratic of Seiler's text).

Overall, Lewis has rendered a target text equally as challenging as Seiler's source text. The source text is steeped in the former world of the GDR and is inherently strange and mysterious. Lewis captures all the complexity and beauty of Seiler's novel in a decidedly 'non-fluent' way.

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